

IN THE CLAIMS

1.-30. (canceled)

31. (canceled)

32. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

~~c) providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the third party does not transfer ownership of the product or service from the selling vendor to the purchasing customer.

33. (canceled)

34. (canceled)

35. (previously presented) The method according to claim 32, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

36. (canceled)

37. (previously presented) The method according to claim ~~31, 32, 33, 34, 35, or 36~~, 32 or 35, wherein the third party is a cable television company, a company offering financial services, an Internet access provider, or a telephone company.

38. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, further comprising the step of obtaining approval for charging the first amount from a party other than the purchasing customer and the selling vendor prior to the step of charging.

39. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38, wherein the party other than the purchasing customer and the selling vendor is a bank, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, or the third party.

40. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the step of charging comprises sending a bill or charging an account with a bank, a cable television company, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, a telephone company, or the third party.

41. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the step of remitting comprises sending a check or crediting an account with a bank, a cable television company, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, a telephone company, or the third party.

42. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the second amount is less than the first amount.

43. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the step of remitting is performed before the step of charging.

44. (canceled)

45. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the company offering financial services does not transfer ownership of the product or service from the selling vendor to the purchasing customer.

46. (currently amended) The method according to any one of claims ~~31-36 and 44-45~~, 32, 35, and 45, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

47. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

48. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

49. (previously presented) The method according to claim 39, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

50. (previously presented) The method according to claim 40, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

51. (previously presented) The method according to claim 41, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

52. (previously presented) The method according to claim 42, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

53. (previously presented) The method according to claim 43, wherein the step of receiving is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction.

54. (currently amended) The method according to any one of claims ~~31-36 and 44-45~~, 32, 35, and 45, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

55. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

56. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

57. (previously presented) The method according to claim 39, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

58. (previously presented) The method according to claim 40, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

59. (previously presented) The method according to claim 41, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

60. (previously presented) The method according to claim 42, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

61. (previously presented) The method according to claim 43, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

62. (previously presented) The method according to claim 46, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

63. (previously presented) The method according to claim 47, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

64. (previously presented) The method according to claim 48, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

65. (previously presented) The method according to claim 49, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

66. (previously presented) The method according to claim 50, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

67. (previously presented) The method according to claim 51, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

68. (previously presented) The method according to claim 52, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

69. (previously presented) The method according to claim 53, wherein the step of establishing a remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer.

70. (currently amended) The method according to any one of claims ~~31-36 and 44-45~~, 32, 35, and 45, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

71. (previously presented) The method according to claim 37, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

72. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

73. (previously presented) The method according to claim 39, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

74. (previously presented) The method according to claim 40, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

75. (previously presented) The method according to claim 41, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

76. (previously presented) The method according to claim 42, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

77. (previously presented) The method according to claim 43, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

78. (previously presented) The method according to claim 46, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

79. (previously presented) The method according to claim 47, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

80. (previously presented) The method according to claim 48, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

81. (previously presented) The method according to claim 49, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

82. (previously presented) The method according to claim 50, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

83. (previously presented) The method according to claim 51, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

84. (previously presented) The method according to claim 52, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

85. (previously presented) The method according to claim 53, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

86. (previously presented) The method according to claim 54, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

87. (previously presented) The method according to claim 55, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

88. (previously presented) The method according to claim 56, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

89. (previously presented) The method according to claim 57, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

90. (previously presented) The method according to claim 58, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

91. (previously presented) The method according to claim 59, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

92. (previously presented) The method according to claim 60, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

93. (previously presented) The method according to claim 61, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

94. (previously presented) The method according to claim 62, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

95. (previously presented) The method according to claim 63, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

96. (previously presented) The method according to claim 64, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

97. (previously presented) The method according to claim 65, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

98. (previously presented) The method according to claim 66, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

99. (previously presented) The method according to claim 67, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

100. (previously presented) The method according to claim 68, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

101. (previously presented) The method according to claim 69, wherein after the step of establishing a billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

102.-165. (canceled)

166. (canceled)

167. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement.

168. (canceled)

169. (canceled)

170. (previously presented) The method according to claim 167, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing

customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

171. (canceled)

172. (canceled)

173. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement.

174. (canceled)

175. (canceled)

176. (previously presented) The method according to claim 173, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

177. (canceled)

178. (canceled)

179. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a

second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

180. (canceled)

181. (canceled)

182. (previously presented) The method according to claim 179, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

183. (canceled)

184. (canceled)

185. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit

the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction:

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement.

186. (canceled)

187. (canceled)

188. (previously presented) The method according to claim 185, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

189. (canceled)

190. (canceled)

191. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a

purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

192. (canceled)

193. (canceled)

194. (previously presented) The method according to claim 191, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

195. (canceled)

196. (canceled)

197. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

198. (canceled)

199. (canceled)

200. (previously presented) The method according to claim 197, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

201. (canceled)

202. (canceled)

203. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party to the purchase transaction of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the third party to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the third party to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the third party to charge the purchasing customer;

~~c) providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the third party does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

204. (canceled)

205. (canceled)

206. (previously presented) The method according to claim 203, wherein no credit card account number of the purchasing customer and no bank account number of the purchasing customer is transmitted over the Internet by the third party to the selling vendor prior to the step of remitting.

207. (canceled)

208. (currently amended) The method according to any one of claims ~~166-207~~, 167, 170, 173, 176, 179, 182, 185, 188, 191, 194, 197, 200, 203, and 206, wherein the third party is a cable television company, a company offering financial services, an Internet access provider, or a telephone company.

209. (previously presented) The method according to claim 208, further comprising the step of obtaining approval for charging the first amount from a party other than the purchasing customer and the selling vendor prior to the step of charging.

210. (previously presented) The method according to claim 209, wherein the party other than the purchasing customer and the selling vendor is a bank, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, or the third party.

211. (previously presented) The method according to claim 208, wherein the step of charging comprises sending a bill or charging an account with a bank, a cable television company, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, a telephone company, or the third party.

212. (previously presented) The method according to claim 208, wherein the step of remitting comprises sending a check or crediting an account with a bank, a cable television company, a company offering financial services, a credit card company, an Internet access provider, a telephone company, or the third party.

213. (previously presented) The method according to claim 208, wherein the second amount is less than the first amount.

214. (previously presented) The method according to claim 208, wherein the step of remitting is performed before the step of charging.

215. (canceled)

216. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing

customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor.

217. (canceled)

218. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor.

219. (canceled)

220. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit

the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction:

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the company offering financial services does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

221. (canceled)

222. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor.

223. (canceled)

224. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the company offering financial services does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

225. (canceled)

226. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service; providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;~~

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the company offering financial services does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.

227. (canceled)

228. (currently amended) An Internet billing method for a plurality of customers and a plurality of vendors of products or services for transactions over the Internet between a purchasing customer of the plurality of customers and a selling vendor of the plurality of vendors, wherein, for each purchase transaction of a product or service between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor, a first amount is charged to the purchasing customer and a

second amount is remitted to the selling vendor, the method comprising the steps by a third party company offering financial services of:

a) establishing a billing agreement with the purchasing customer to permit the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer and to remit to a selling vendor for a purchase transaction;

b) establishing a remitting agreement with the selling vendor to permit the company offering financial services to charge a purchasing customer and to remit to the selling vendor for a purchase transaction, wherein the remitting agreement does not require the company offering financial services to charge the purchasing customer;

c) ~~providing a communications link over the Internet between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to request information from the selling vendor with respect to the product or service;~~ providing a communications link through equipment of the third party between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to permit the purchasing customer to communicate over the Internet with the selling vendor concerning the purchase transaction;

d) receiving authorization over the Internet from the purchasing customer to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer without previously receiving a request from the selling vendor to charge the first amount to the purchasing customer, wherein receiving authorization is performed after the purchasing customer and the selling vendor have agreed to enter into the purchase transaction;

e) charging the first amount to the purchasing customer in accordance with the billing agreement by charging a bank account, a credit card account, or an account with the company offering financial services ; and

f) remitting the second amount to the selling vendor in accordance with the remitting agreement without previously transmitting a credit card account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor and without previously transmitting a bank account number of the purchasing customer over the Internet to the selling vendor,

wherein after establishing the billing agreement the company offering financial services does not approve an agreement between the purchasing customer and the selling vendor to enter into the purchase transaction.